

June 27, 2005     On Friday Congress defeated an amendment I introduced that would have prevented the federal government from moving forward with an Orwellian program to mandate mental health screening of kids in schools. This program, recommended by a presidential commission, has not yet been established at the federal level. However, your tax dollars are being given to states that apply for grants to establish their own programs-- and a full-fledged program run by the Department of Health and Human Services is on the way. Nearly 100 members of Congress supported my amendment. Many of these members represent Texas and Illinois, two states that already have mental health screening programs in place. They have heard from their constituents, who believe intimate mental health problems should be addressed by parents, kids, and their doctors- not the government. These parents do not appreciate yet another government program that undermines their parental authority. The psychiatric establishment and the pharmaceutical industry of course support government mental health screening programs in schools, because they both stand to benefit from millions of new customers. But we should not allow self-interested industries to use a government program to create a captive audience for their products. We should be especially careful about medicating children with psychotropic drugs when their brains are still developing. Far too many children are being stigmatized by dubious diagnoses like Attention Deficit Disorder, and placed on drugs simply because they exhibit behavior that we used to understand as restlessness or rambunctious horseplay. This is especially true of young boys, who cannot thrive in our increasingly feminized government schools. Sadly, many parents and teachers find it easier to drug energetic boys than discipline them. Dr. Karen R. Effrem, a pediatrician and leading opponent of government mental health screening, makes the following points about such programs:     -Parental rights under such programs are at best unclear, at worst nonexistent;     -Many parents already have been forced by schools to put their children on psychotropic drugs, and this surely will accelerate under a federal screening program;     -Screening programs do not prevent suicide;     -Psychiatric diagnoses are inherently subjective and based on "social constructions";     -Most psychiatric drugs do not work in children;     -We do not know the long-term consequences of using psychiatric drugs on children; and     -Screening programs will be influenced by politics. Children of religious parents, for example, risk being labeled "homophobic."     Certainly there are legitimate organic mental illnesses, but that does not mean it is the role of government to subject every child to arbitrary screening without the consent of parents. Most Americans still understand that certain things are none of the government's business, even if Congress does not. If you are a parent, do everything you can to protect your children by demanding to be notified of any screening program in their schools. As a voter, let your state and federal legislators know that you don't want tax dollars spent on mental health screening programs. If we act now, we still can prevent the federal government from creating a nationwide, mandatory program that will place millions of American youngsters into a stigmatized, drugged, mental health ghetto.